DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 318 988 CS 010 004

AUTHOR Bock, Joan
TITLE Portraits of Six Developing Readers in a Whole Language Classroom.
PUB DATE Nov 89
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference (39th, Austin, TX, November 28-December 2, 1989). Small print in Table 1 may be difficult to read.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Beginning Reading; Case Studies; Classroom Environment; Classroom Research; Family Characteristics; Grade 2; *High Risk Students; Primary Education; Qualitative Research; Reading Attitudes; *Reading Habits; Reading Interests; Reading Processes; Student Characteristics; *Whole Language Approach; Writing Processes
IDENTIFIERS Education Consolidation Improvement Act Chapter 1

ABSTRACT

A study investigated how second-grade learners, identified as less proficient, continued their literacy learning in a whole language classroom. Subjects, six second-grade Chapter 1 students, were observed during independent reading time twice per week over a period of 8 months. Additional data collection procedures included participant observation, field notes, informal interviews, reading miscue inventories, audio-tape recordings, questionnaires, photographs, and test results. Results indicated that the whole language environment supported each of the unique less proficient learners and facilitated optimum growth in reading and writing. Results also indicated the multiple factors that contributed to the uniqueness of the subjects: (1) early language experiences; (2) family literacy support; (3) metacognitive awareness of reading and writing processes; (4) instructional methods; (5) social process variables; and (6) physical characteristics of the learners. (Two tables of data are included; 28 references are attached.) (RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED318988

Joan Bock

PORTRAITS OF SIX DEVELOPING READERS IN A WHOLE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

There is an impressive amount of information on how young children learn to read and write from research studies of the 1980s' (Bissex, 1980; Dyson, 1983; Goodman, Y., 1986; Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1984; Holdaway, 1979; Teale & Sulzby, 1985; Wells, 1986). Furthermore, many researchers have explored how children continue literacy processes that begin at home within classroom structures (Butler & Turnbill, 1984; Calkins, 1983; Cazden, 1982; Clay, 1985; Graves, 1983; Hansen, 1987; Hickman, 1979; Routman, 1988).

These research reports document successful literacy growth in whole language classrooms for proficient language users. However, there remains the prevailing question of how readers who are less proficient function in this curriculum. This author contends that there are many similarities in literacy learning between young pre-school children and those who have been labeled less proficient readers in a classroom.

Children's background knowledge in literacy, cultural family traditions, teacher expectations and the peer culture within the classroom, all influence how children develop their perceptions of reading and writing. Theoretically, a whole language curriculum reading and writing opportunities. Because learners have an active role in self-selecting and self-regulating their literacy activities, they engage in meaningful choices that facilitate an understanding of literacy learning as a means of obtaining knowledge or enjoying literature.

This investigation was designed to explore how six second grade learners, who were identified as less proficient, continued their literacy learning in a classroom embracing a whole language theoretical perspective. Research questions that guided the study (Bock, 1989) focused on social interactions, the learner's individual activities during independent reading time, types and difficulty levels of books they selected, and reading process strategies/cueing systems that they used during oral reading.

In this article, the focus is specifically on the individual characteristics and behaviors of the six learners and how they interpreted the reading process within the classroom structure. By examining the differences and commonalities among the six developing readers, the wide variations in literacy learning that were present and nurtured in this classroom community will be illustrated.

CS010004

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

JOAN BOCK

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

METHOD

Setting and Participants

The focal classroom was selected because it exemplifyed the key characteristics of a whole language curriculum. The instructor was a veteran second grade teacher of fourteen years who portrayed a whole language theoretical orientation (DeFord, 1985). There were twenty-two heterogeneously grouped students in the class. Six subjects were identified as less proficient than their peers by using quantitative instruments, teacher-anecdotal notes, and oral reading observations. They were all receiving aid through the Chapter One Reading Program. The Chapter One Instructor for the second grades met with her students within the classroom each morning during independent reading time.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Independent reading time (approximately 40 minutes daily) was observed an average of twice per week over a period of eight months. Qualitative methods were utilized to take into account the ever-present connections between social and cognitive dimensions of the focal learners' literacy activities (Erickson, 1986).

Data collection and analysis was divided into four phases as seen in Table 1. Data collection procedures included participant observation, field notes, informal interviews, reading miscue inventories (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 1987), audio-tape recording, questionnaires, photographs, recording artifacts, and collecting test results.

Table 1

Data Analysis Procedures

	Focus	Technique
Phase I	Refine methodological procedures Recognize initial social process patterns Recognize initial reading process patterns	Code field notes Indefinite triangulation Summarize RMI data on individual coding forms Summarize RMI data on percentage charts
Phase II	Search for social process patterns Search for reading process patterns Develop working hypotheses Construct an inventory of working hypotheses	Code transcribed reading interview data Code field notes Indefinite triangulation Summarize RMI data Code reading log data Analytic induction
Phase III	Refine social process patterns Refine reading process patterns Narrow focus for final data collection	Code field notes Indefinite triangulation Compare, contrast, and extend hypotheses Code transcribed audio-tape recordings Formulate summarization charts for reading log and book selection data Summarize RMI data
Phase IV	Refine and extend social and reading process patterns Check for credibility of social and reading process patterns	Code field notes Indefinite triangulation Formulate summarization charts for social interaction/ individual endeavor patterns and RMI summaries across the school year Code reading interview II data Do interrater reliability checks for social and reading process patterns

Data Collection Procedures

Duration	Focus	Techniques
Phase I 1 month	Choose subjects Define Researcher Role Become Familiar with classroom curriculum Delineate time frame for data collection	Participant observation Field notes in setting Informal interviews - students/teachers Reading Miscue Inventory (RMI) 1
Phase II 4 months	Develop hypotheses	Participant observation Reading Interview I Field notes in setting RMI 2 List book selections Photocopied reading logs Audio-tape record Chapter One sessions
Phase III 1 month	Search for discrepant cases Search for similarities among all students Refine hypotheses	Participant observation Field notes in setting RMI 3 List book selections Photocopied reading logs Field notes on Parent - Teacher Conferences Literacy History Questionnaire
Phase IV 2 months	Refine hypotheses Discover relationships Field exit	Participant observation Field notes in setting RMI 4 Reading Interview II Audio-tape record List book selections Photocopied reading logs Collect test results Photographs

Constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and purposive sampling (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were two data analysis procedures that were valuable in formulating and refining hypotheses to demonstrate commonalities and differences in characteristics of literacy learning portrayed by the six focal learners. For a detailed description of the phases, refer to Bock (1989).

PORTRAITS IN CONTRAST

Social Influences of the Community

During the first week in the classroom, there were three notes on the message board from Lucy. They each stated, "I love you". Lucy demonstrated in many ways that "being liked" and "pleasing others" were important aspirations for her. It was not uncommon to hear her offer to make a picture or a story for someone. There were times when this concern for friendship supported her literacy acts. For example, Lucy often sat beside peers, not hesitating to ask questions about spelling or how to pronounce words. Furthermore, she enjoyed taking turns oral reading with peers, frequently rereading big books, poetry books, or other favorites.

It was during observations of Lucy, that an awareness of the importance of social process surfaced. As her more successful counterparts became involved in their literacy activities, Lucy spent a great deal of time watching others at their tasks, looking for someone to sit beside, or in a more positive light, creating a picture, story, or note to give to someone. It was hypothesized that internalization of sociability and communication processes was necessary before Lucy would be able to turn her full attention to cognitive aspects of learning.

In contrast, Josh was well liked and spent large amounts of time deeply involved in individual literacy activities. However, he also participated regularly in visits to the "beanbag" corner of the room where several boys and girls gravitated daily at the end of independent reading time. Sometimes head to head, he talked or read quietly with the others. They discussed pictures, talked about stories, and often related the stories to their everyday experiences.

Perhaps the focal learner who was most supported by the community was Tonya. The teacher often commented that the girls who encouraged her to read certain books, join their group, and to sit beside them during independent reading time, were a motivating force behind Tonya's growth in reading and writing. Her writing became more focused and coherent, and her reading was meaningful and fluent. It was not

surprising in early February to read an entry in her reading log which stated, "My favorite thing is to read. I read a lot. I like to read. You get to learn if you read".

Barbara, too, was supported by the classroom community as she developed social and literacy skills simultaneously. Quiet and unassuming, she possessed a strong desire to please people. This may have been partially the result of a sketchy history of child neglect. She was "pushed aside" with two siblings into a closed room until age four when she went to live with her grandparents.

On a typical morning, she read orally to several adults and sat beside peers, either taking turns reading or talking about text and pictures. On one occasion, Barbara listened and followed along as her friend Danny read The Treasure by Shulevitz. Two days later, she partner read orally with Danny. On the next observation visit, she asked if she could read orally. Although it was a difficult book for her, she read several pages with very few miscues. She also told the story enthusiastically.

Through supportive social interactions such as this one, the void in preschool literacy experiences was partially counterbalanced. On another occasion, Jay brought his chair over to Barbara's desk and they each contributed to a book response about what was funny in the story they had read. Barbara learned how to communicate with others more efficiently as she was progressed in her language development.

Perceptions of the Reading Process

The focal learners were each unique in their interpretations of the reading process. The whole language environment encouraged them to develop strategies and make meaningful selections.

Early in the year, Robert sampled books randomly, often returning to the book shelf several times during independent reading time. He sampled print as well. During the first reading interview, Robert said, "if you don't know a word, skip it and then try to figure out some other words". Robert skipped words, and occasionally, entire sentences. If asked to go back and read a line, however, he did so without hesitating. Otherwise he proceeded with his reading.

In contrast, Josh believed that "getting the words right" was the most important component in reading. When he was asked, "is getting the words correct more important than knowing what it is all about?" and he answered, "yeah". This comment

was substantiated by the number of self-corrections portrayed in his oral reading. In each of the Reading Miscue Inventories, Josh self-corrected approximately half of his miscues.

Both of these boys were goal-directed in their approach to reading books and writing responses during independent reading time. After selecting books, they sat at their desks reading until they finished their selections. their number of written responses were the highest of all the focal learners; with Josh responding to 47% of his selections and Robert responding to 67%.

The children changed dramatically over the year in their attitudes toward reading. One contention is that the beanbag interactions alluded to earlier influenced their changes in attitude. For example, they each developed interests in particular topics and became avid writers. In fact, Josh related reading to the writing process in the second reading interview. He said, "One thing I like about it is, you learn to spell, and you learn how to read, and it helps you write books. Another thing I like is that it gives you ideas for writing books".

Another contrast in how the focal learners perceived the reading process was portrayed by Jay. When he read orally, he expected to be fluent and have conversational expression. He actively constructed meaning and the words were incidental, similar to Smith's description of incidental print (Smith, 1985). Jay did not self-correct if the story made sense, and in fact, on several occasions, he inserted words that had different meanings than the actual print and continued reading.

Jay's comments in the second reading interview indicate that he was using a number of strategies to make sense of the print. For example, when asked about figuring out unknown words, he said, "I try to figure it out. . I look at the pictures, or I look at another page to see if it makes sense. . . The whole sentence has to be right. It tells a story".

The focal learners reread for different reasons. Lucy reread her favorite books (21% of the total number recorded), usually selecting ones with words that were not difficult for her. In a reading interview, Lucy reiterated several times that the most important aspect in becoming a good reader was to know all of the words. Furthermore, if she selected a difficult book, she usually changed it for a different one.

Table 2

Rereadings of Book Selections

	Rereadings	Percentage	Total Books Read
Lucy	11	21%	52
Josh	3	7%	45
Tonya	5	14%	37
Robert	7	16%	43
Barbara	9	20%	46
Jay	6	14%	42

Barbara, on other hand, reread 20% of her selections, all except one at the difficult level. During the first reading interview, Barbara said, "by choosing difficult books, you learn how to read better". This intentional effort is also illustrated by the following experience when she was writing a report on becoming a teacher. She asked to read to me from a book about teachers that was very difficult. After finishing, she said, "Mrs. Johnson read this to me because I didn't understand it. Now I can read it".

Tonya's perceptions of the reading process changed dramatically. In the reading miscue inventories, there was a significant increase in syntactic and semantic acceptability with no meaning change. There was also a dramatic decrease in miscues with high graphic and phonic similarities as she began using only the first letter to predict an unknown word.

During the second interview, she discussed keeping several books on hand to read because "sometimes I like to read easy books, and sometimes I like to read hard books". The two she mentioned reading at that time were: Really Ridiculous Rabbit Riddles by J. Wallace and Superfudge by Judy Blume which are good examples of her criteria. It was hypothesized that her written responses and letters to her favorite authors helped facilitate meaningful transactions which led to an understanding of reading as a personal activity.

A Shared Interest in Playful Language

A striking trend in this classroom was the amount of shared interest in poetry, riddles, and jokes that were read and enjoyed by all members of the community. These events were marked by playful uses of language. Students suggested books with riddles or poems to one another, shared them with one another, and practiced

weekly chart poems together. Their teacher was a driving force behind many of the literacy events that promoted shared interests as well as a sense of community. She began each day with the class reciting a chart poem. Furthermore, she provided an extensive collection of poetry, riddle and joke books.

A second trend was the construction, reading, and sharing of class big books. This was a group activity that enabled each classroom member to have a role. The focal learners easily fit into groups taking turns reading these books. It was a common occurrence for a group of three or four readers to spread out on the floor with a big book and read together.

Playful language was portrayed daily by the focal learners. For example, Barbara read riddles with other girls, copied poems in her reading log, and printed on the chalk board in geometric designs. One of her favorite activities was reading the chart poem orally as other girls took turns using a long pointer as they "played teacher".

Jay compared reading with watching cartoons on television. He said, "it's like, if you open the book, you're watching the whole cartoon". Comments, such as "it's like the pictures jump out of the book", and "I pretend that it's TV that I'm reading" suggest playful use of language. It was also portrayed in his book selections of poetry, Dr. Seuss books, and big books.

In the first reading interview, Tonya told me that what she liked best about reading were the "funny words. . like rhymes and jokes". She demonstrated this enjoyment daily by seeking other peers or adults to listen to riddles or poems. Twenty-five percent of her book selections were poetry. In fact, she carried favorite books with her, such as Light in the Attic and Where the Sidewalk Ends by Shel Silverstein. Playful language was a shared interest for the focal learners that was a catalyst for seeking out peers and was often instrumental in framing other literacy events and shared experiences.

DISCUSSION

These readers, identified as less proficient, were each unique and were developing personal understandings of literacy processes having little to do with chronological age. This classroom allowed this uniqueness; in fact, it encouraged these learners to progress at their own pace, to develop an understanding of the reading process, and to have fun with language.

Vygotsky (1978) suggests that cognitive development occurs first in an external or social context. Observations of Jay and Lucy as they developed an understanding of social processes, demonstrate the significance of this internalization. In fact, social process was a key variable for all of the focal readers in their growth of literacy learning. Tonya was encouraged by more proficient readers and had opportunities that she may not have had in a traditional classroom.

Josh and Robert both became very involved in beanbag group discussions and sharing. For Josh, this provided experiences in vocabulary development and gave literacy activities purpose and meaning. Robert, too, benefited in these ways, but even more importantly, he settled down and actually enjoyed discussions and sharing beyond sampling. His attitude toward reading was given focus and meaning.

Barbara grew in language development as well as learning about ways to communicate with others more efficiently. She was in the process of internalizing strategies, cueing systems, and purposeful reading and writing through classroom demonstrations and expectations.

Lucy often avoided risks and if confronted with an anomaly, she usually changed her activity rather than trying to make sense of it. These patterns became habits that were resistant to change. Although the risk-free environment of this classroom community was an important factor for changing these habits, Lucy continued to have difficulties with self-motivation, self-direction and self-regulation. Her teacher equated her instruction during the school year with "ploughing the ground" so that Lucy could continue progressing toward becoming a proficient literacy learner.

Comments and observations suggest that Jay was just beginning to develop an understanding of literacy processes. When asked how he could tell if a book selection fit, he said, "I tell by the pictures. I take it out, and then I start looking at the pictures. Then I start reading." Jay expected print to be meaningful however. His understanding of the reading process was becoming social interactions, taking risks, and building confidence in cueing systems. This classroom supported these needs and allowed him to progress at his own pace.

The focal learners interpreted their roles in the classroom community differently. The multiple factors that contributed to the uniqueness of these learners, and their role interpretations, are extensive. Many cognitive and social aspects of literacy learning have been alluded to throughout this report. They include: early language experiences, family literacy support, metacognitive awareness of reading and writing

processes, instructional methods, social process variables, and physical characteristics of the learners. The whole language environment, described in this report, supported each of these unique learners and facilitated optimum growth in reading and writing.

Further research should include examining the types of literacy activities in which children are engaged in numerous settings. A broader design could also explore components of instruction, peer culture, activities and materials in more detail. Particular populations who have histories of difficulties with literacy development, could also be carefully defined and observed in numerous contexts to provide further insights on positive social and cognitive strengths pertinent to their learning.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bissex, G. (1980). Gnys at wrk: A child learns to read and write. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Bock, J. (1989). Developing Readers in a Whole Language Classroom. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati.

Blume, J. Superfudge. New York: Dell Publications.

Butler, A., & Turbill, J. (1984). Towards a reading-writing classroom. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, Inc.

Calkins, L. M. (1983). Lessons from a child. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, Inc.

Cazden, C. B. (1982). Contexts for literacy: In the mind and in the classroom. Journal of Reading Behavior, 14, 413-427.

Clay, M. M. (1985). The early detection of reading difficulties (3rd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinnemann Educational Books.

DeFord, D. (1985). Validating the construct of theoretical orientation in reading instruction. Reading Research Quarterly, 20, 351-367.

Dyson, A. H. (1983). The role of oral language in early writing processes. Research in the teaching of English, 17, 1-30.

Erickson, F. (1986). Tasks in times: objects of study in a natural history of teaching. In K. K. Zumwalt (Ed.), Improving teaching: 1986 ASCD Yearbook (pp. 111-147). Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Glasser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). The discovery of grounded theory. Chicago: Aldine.

Goodman, Y. (1986). Children coming to know literacy. In B. Teale & E. Sulzby (eds.), Emergent literacy. Reading and writing in early childhood. Noorwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Goodman, Y., Watson, D., & Burke, C. (1987). Reading Miscue Inventory. Alternative Procedures. New York: Richard C. Owen.

Graves, D. H. (1983). Writing: Teachers and children at work. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, Inc.

Hansen, J. (1987). When writers read. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, Inc.

Harste, J. C., Woodward, V. A., & Burke, C. L. (1984). Language stories & literacy lessons. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, Inc.

Hickman, J. (1979). Responses to literature in a school environment, grades K-5. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Ohio State University, Columbus.

Holdaway, D. (1979). The foundations of literacy. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, Inc.

Routman, R. (1988). Transitions from literature to literacy. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books.

Shulevitz, U. The Treasure. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Silverstein, S. A Light in the Attic. New York: Harper & Row.

Silverstein, S. Where the Sidewalk Ends. New York: Harper & Row.

Sulzby, E. (1986). Writing and reading: Signs of oral and written language organization in the young child. In W. H. Teale & E. Sulzby (Eds.), Emergent Literacy: Reading and writing development in early childhood. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). (Eds.) M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman. Mind in Society. The Development of Higher Psychological Processes. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Wallace, J. Really Ridiculous Rabbit Riddles. New York: Random House.

Wells, G. (1986). The meaning makers. Children learning language and using language to mean. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books.